



Representative

TOBY NIXON • 45th District

REPORT ON THE 2003 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Committees: Technology, Telecommunications & Energy (Assistant Ranking Republican); Transportation; State Government; Joint Legislative Systems Committee

September 2003

Dear friends,

During the spring I hosted a series of public meetings around our legislative district. When I compare the questions asked at those meetings to the outcome of the 2003 legislative session, which concluded in June, I'd have to say things turned out pretty well. For example, we balanced the state's operating budget without raising taxes and approved a package of improvements to our transportation system. We also preserved education funding in key areas while helping our schools attract and retain beginning teachers. Please take a few minutes to read my report on those actions and other important decisions that were made, and how they affect us.

I am honored to serve as your representative and am always ready to help. While this report is a good way to reach you with information, I really prefer to correspond more directly with you. If you send me your e-mail address, I will keep you posted about things happening at the Capitol, and policies or actions that affect the 45th District. You can also use e-mail to ask me a question, contact me on MSN Messenger (tobynixon@hotmail.com), get a message to me via the toll-free legislative hotline, or put a letter in the mail to me.

If you want to share your opinion or need help from my office, don't hesitate to get in touch. I always appreciate hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Toby Nixon



OLYMPIA OFFICE:

437 John L. O'Brien Bldg.
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

TELEPHONE:

360-786-7878 or
1-800-562-6000 (Legislative Hotline)

E-MAIL:

nixon_to@leg.wa.gov

INTERNET PAGE:

<http://hrc.leg.wa.gov/members/nixon.htm>

LEGISLATIVE INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET:

<http://www.leg.wa.gov>

STATE GOVERNMENT ON THE INTERNET:

<http://access.wa.gov>

▶ CONTACT INFORMATION

New investments in transportation to get Washington moving again

Efficient, safe roads are good for families and good for business. This year the Legislature passed a plan to build the roads and make the highway improvements that will relieve the traffic congestion that frustrates our citizens and stifles economic development.

The transportation budget adopted for 2003-05 includes \$3.4 billion in highway improvements. They'll be funded with the revenues raised by a five-cent increase in the gas tax, a 15 percent increase in truck weight fees and a title transfer fee. It's the first increase in the state gas tax since 1991.

In addition to funding highway projects, the transportation budget would spend \$603 million on other forms of transportation, including public transit and ferries.

Will this turn our traffic situation around? It depends on whether the Department of Transportation is up to the task. King County taxpayers know all too well how mismanagement can turn a transportation project into a wasteful disappointment. We deserve performance and efficiency, and I'll be watching.

Funding important education needs

Teachers in Washington are paid based on a salary schedule set by the state. Education organizations have told us often the wages for beginning teachers were too low to attract people to the teaching profession, and that many young teachers are leaving the classroom early in their careers in favor of jobs that pay better.

To help balance the state's operating budget, the governor suggested suspending the pay raises for teachers authorized by Initiative 732 – raises above and beyond the regular annual "step" increases available to teachers. However, the budget adopted took the education community's concerns into account and provided money to boost salaries for teachers with seven or fewer years' experience. This will help our schools attract and retain beginning teachers rather than lose them to other, higher-paying professions.

Under the new budget, by the end of next year, the average annual salary for a teacher in Washington will be nearly \$46,000 – and every teacher will make at least \$30,000 per year.

The budget also includes \$30 million more for class-size reductions (Initiative 728) than the governor requested. The per-pupil grant will equal \$254 per student, compared to the \$212 proposed by Gov. Locke.

Leaner state budget protects key services without general tax hike

This year the Legislature was required to write a new state operating budget to pay for things like education and social and health services in 2003-05. Between things like higher costs for products (such as medications purchased for state-funded health services) and hoped-for spending increases (such as pay raises for teachers and other state employees), we were told midway through the session that state government would be \$2.7 billion short.

House and Senate members had two choices: raise taxes to cover the anticipated cost increases, or reduce services to an affordable level. We ultimately agreed on a budget balanced **without a general tax increase.**

The compromise budget allocates a little more than \$23 billion for state government operations in 2003-05. That's just 2 percent larger than the 2001-03 budget – the smallest growth from one budget to the next in **at least 40 years** in our state.

Agreeing on a lean state budget wasn't easy. It took 31 days of work in May and June, spread across two special sessions, to arrive at a compromise that avoided hundreds of millions of dollars in additional taxes.

Besides holding the line on taxes, the budget that took effect July 1 focuses on priorities. It protected health coverage for 100,000 low-income families, which is 40,000 more families than the governor's proposed budget would have covered. The budget avoided

drastic cuts in services for the developmentally disabled and troubled children. It protects health care services for children living at up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level, and provides a 75-cent-per-hour pay raise for home health care workers.

Economic conditions have forced families and employers across Washington to focus on the essentials and tighten their belts. Now government will do the same.

Progress toward a better business climate

One of my priorities this session was legislation aimed at preserving and creating jobs. The transportation improvements we approved will help, and so will legislation to address and resolve issues that inflate the cost of doing business in Washington.

We passed legislation (SB 5271) to reform a section of the state workers' compensation system. It will preserve medical

Representative
TOBY NIXON
45th District

**REPORT ON THE 2003
LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

benefits for injured workers but could save up to \$200 million over the next two years alone, by reducing the number of hearing-loss claims being improperly charged to employers.

Even more important to our state's ability to attract and retain employers was the vote to overhaul Washington's unemployment insurance (UI) system.

Boeing, for example, has been paying a UI premium of \$772 per employee in Washington. That's compared to \$378 per worker in California, \$482 per employee in Oregon and just \$105 per worker in Kansas.

Senate Bill 6097, passed with bipartisan support, reformed the UI tax structure to better reflect real-world layoff experience. It also brings the UI system back into line with its original purpose: to help people who have become unemployed unexpectedly.

Much of the legislative opposition to overhauling the UI system had to do with seasonal workers. I believe it's one thing for seasonal workers to seek unemployment benefits when they unexpectedly lose their jobs before the season is over. But it's another for unemployed seasonal workers to claim UI benefits when the season ends and, predictably, so do their jobs. Is it fair for them to expect the UI system (meaning taxpayers) to tide them over until another season, rather than arrange for work in the following season or set enough money aside during the work season to get through to the next job?

Even with the overhaul, our UI system is still one of the most generous in the nation.

Landing Boeing's 7E7 jetliner project

I want to see Boeing choose Washington as the site for constructing its new 7E7 "Dreamliner" aircraft. The workers' compensation and unemployment-insurance reforms we adopted will help make Washington a serious contender in the national competition for the 7E7.

The Legislature also approved a big package of tax incentives for Boeing, which will take effect *only* if the 7E7 work comes to Washington.

My legislation: some successes, some to try again

The hits: The Legislature and governor agreed with my proposal (House Bill 1052) to expand the state's Good Samaritan law. The change gives specific immunity to construction professionals who voluntarily make emergency repairs without expecting compensation. Of the several pieces of legislation I have introduced, it was the first to become law.

Also becoming law was House Bill 2007, the measure I introduced to create a commercial electronic text-messaging law similar to the state's anti-spam law (see related story).

The Legislature adopted House Joint Memorial 4004, my measure asking Congress to let Washington residents deduct state sales tax payments when calculating their federal income taxes (as they could until 1986).

The misses: I was disappointed House Bill 1016 never was brought to a vote of the entire House even though it received committee approval. This bill would clamp down on juvenile car thieves, who commit the majority of auto thefts but receive detention sentences that don't seem to be effective deterrents.

I wanted to exempt environmentally friendly "biodiesel" fuel from the five-cent increase in the state fuel tax. But my proposal, in the form of an amendment to the transportation budget, was re-

jected even though the House already had passed several bills supporting the production of biodiesel. I thought it would make sense to encourage the consumption of biodiesel by limiting the tax on it, but I was told to try again next year.

Some residents of the 45th District live close enough to the proposed Brightwater wastewater plant site in Snohomish County to have legitimate concerns about air and water quality. I co-sponsored House Bill 1000 to force Brightwater through the Snohomish County siting process. But the bill was changed at the committee level in a way that exempts Brightwater, taking away another chance for neighbors to have a voice.



I was pleased to sponsor Hannah Nelson of Redmond when she served as a legislative page during the 2003 session. Students who want to serve as pages next year should apply soon because slots are limited; please call my office for details.

You can make a difference in Olympia

If you've ever wondered whether one person can make a difference in our government, talk to Kathy Swan. She and her husband got tired of receiving "spam" text messages on their cellular phones. She brought her complaint to me, and together we came up with House Bill 2007, which creates a commercial electronic text-messaging law similar to the state's anti-spam law.

Kathy went to Olympia from her Redmond-area home to testify when the bill came before me and the other members of the House Technology, Telecommunications and Energy Committee. She later accepted my invitation to watch Gov. Locke sign HB 2007 into law. It gives owners of cell phones and text pagers new protection against paying to receive unwanted ads, or having the text memory of their devices wiped out by unsolicited messages.

Do you have to travel to Olympia if you have an idea for a change in the law? I appreciate Kathy's personal involvement, but the answer is no, traveling isn't necessary. Just take the same first step she did: let me know what's on your mind. I'll help as much as I can.



Please mark your calendars for November 15 meetings

The 2004 legislative session will begin in mid-January. I'd like to get together with 45th District residents before then — and before the end-of-year holidays — to look at the issues ahead and listen to your viewpoints on them. So I've scheduled three public meetings around the district:

Saturday, November 15

10 - 11:30 a.m.
Carnation Library
4804 Tolt Avenue

1 - 2:30 p.m.
Council Chambers,
Woodinville City Hall
17301 133rd Avenue NE

3:30 - 5 p.m.
Kirkland Library
308 Kirkland Avenue

I hope you're able to attend one of these. If not, please write, e-mail or phone to share any advice, questions, comments or opinions with me. I appreciate hearing what's on your mind!

Report on the 2003 Legislative Session

State Representative
Toby Nixon
P.O. Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
OLYMPIA WA
PERMIT NO 92